

Continuing our journey through the Book of Acts and dealing with What Matters in the church, we come this morning to the first Christian sermon recorded in the Bible. The preacher is Simon Peter – the occasion is the Pentecost Festival in Jerusalem – the audience is multiethnic Jewish pilgrims from Eastern Europe, the Middle East, northern Africa, and the Mediterranean islands – and the buzz of the crowd is, “How is it possible that these Galilean followers of Jesus are speaking to us of the magnificent acts of God in our own native languages?”

14) Peter stood up with the Eleven, raised his voice, and proclaimed to them: *Fellow Jews and all you residents of Jerusalem, let me explain this to you and pay attention to my words.* 15) *For these people are not drunk, as you suppose, since it's only nine in the morning.* 16) *On the contrary, this is what was spoken through the prophet Joel:* 17) *And it will be in the last days, says God, that I will pour out my Spirit on all people; then your sons and your daughters will prophesy, your young men will see visions, and your old men will dream dreams.* 18) *I will even pour out my Spirit on my servants in those days, both men and women and they will prophesy.* 19) *I will display wonders in the heaven above and signs on the earth below: blood and fire and a cloud of smoke.* 20) *The sun will be turned to darkness and the moon to blood before the great and glorious day of the Lord comes.* 21) *Then everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved.* 22) *Fellow Israelites, listen to these words: This Jesus of Nazareth was a man attested to you by God with miracles, wonders, and signs that God did among you through him, just as you yourselves know.* 23) *Though he was delivered up according to God's determined plan and foreknowledge, you used lawless people to nail him to a cross and kill him.* 24) *God raised him up, ending the pains of death, because it was not possible for him to be held by death.* 25) *For David says of him: I saw the Lord ever before me; because he is at my right hand, I will not be shaken.* 26) *Therefore my heart is glad and my tongue rejoices. Moreover, my flesh will rest in hope,* 27) *because you will not abandon me in Hades or allow your holy one to see decay.* 28) *You have revealed the paths of life to me; you will fill me with gladness in your presence.* 29) *Brothers and sisters, I can confidently speak to you about the patriarch David: He is both dead and buried, and his tomb is with us to this day.* 30) *Since he was a prophet, he knew that God had sworn an oath to him to seat one of his descendants on his throne.* 31) *Seeing what was to come, he spoke concerning the resurrection of the Messiah: He was not abandoned in Hades, and his flesh did not experience decay.* 32) *God has raised this Jesus; we are all witnesses of this.* 33) *Therefore, since he has been exalted to the right hand of God and has received from the Father the promised Holy Spirit, he has poured*

out what you both see and hear. 34) For it was not David who ascended into the heavens, but he himself says: The Lord declared to my Lord, Sit at my right hand. 35) until I make your enemies your footstool. 36) Therefore let all the house of Israel know with certainty that God has made this Jesus, whom you crucified, both Lord and Messiah.” 37) When they heard this, they were pierced to the heart and said to Peter and the rest of the apostles: “Brothers, what should we do?” 38) Peter replied, “Repent and be baptized, each of you, in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins, and you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. 39) For the promise is for you and for your children, and for all who are far off, as many as the Lord our God will call. 40) With many other words he testified and strongly urged them, saying, “Be saved from this corrupt generation!” 41) So those who accepted his message were baptized, and that day about three thousand people were added to them.

From this point forward in the theological DNA of the first century church, two initiatives will become the practice and purpose of the church – preaching and personal witnessing. The Apostles became the leaders of the first century church and mighty preachers of the Gospel of Jesus Christ. In the first century church Christian preaching became the centerpiece of worship. And it should be no different today. I’m convinced that one of the reasons that God has blessed Southern Baptists to become the largest evangelical church in America and one of the largest missionary-sending denominations in the world is because we believe in the calling and equipping of preachers and missionaries and chaplains to preach and teach the Scriptures. I serve on the faculty one of six Southern Baptist seminaries in North America, all of which place heavy emphasis on the preaching and teaching of the Scriptures. We’re your seminary and you have the right to expect those we train to be pastors of our churches to also be preachers of God’s truth. You have a right to expect and demand that your next pastor’s first priority and primary responsibility is to proclaim, to herald, preach God’s inerrant, inspired, infallible Word. You’ve experienced that expectation for 61 years. Both of your former pastors, Bro. Perry and Bro. Steve, stood here Sunday after Sunday and preached well. And I can assure you that the Pastor Search Committee is focused on finding your next pastor as one who can preach well. We may struggle with how to worship through the music we play, the songs we sing, the offerings we give, the prayers we pray, and the testimonies we share, but we must never compromise or minimize **The priority of preaching: We gather for worship to hear a word from God proclaimed from the Word of God, because Preaching Matters.**

The Pentecost sermon forms a pattern, a template, for the kind of preaching we should expect.

1. **We should expect Christ-centered Preaching.** Remember what's just happened. Ten days after Jesus ascended into heaven, 120 believers experienced the indwelling and empowering of the Holy Spirit, enabling them to communicate in the multiplicity of language dialects gathered at the Jewish celebration of Pentecost. They were all astounded and perplexed, saying to one another, "*What does this mean?*" But some sneered and said, "*They're drunk on new wine.*" (2:12-13). Peter stood up with the Eleven, raised his voice, and proclaimed to them: *Fellow Jews and all you residents of Jerusalem, let me explain this to you and pay attention to my words. For these people are not drunk, as you suppose, since it's only nine in the morning. (A bit of humor here – people don't get drunk on wine first thing in the morning!) On the contrary, this is what was spoken through the prophet Joel.* Peter then quotes Joel 2:28-32 as the interpretation of this event: The "last days" have arrived. One of the signals of the end times is what Joel prophesied – the outpouring of the Spirit. *Then everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved.* Verse 21 frames the focus of the sermon.

- **Christian preaching confesses Jesus as Lord.** Everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved. No one is saved without confessing Jesus as Lord – He's the way, the truth, and the life, and no one receives the gift of eternal life and gets to heaven without calling on the name of the Lord. *Give the winds a mighty voice, Jesus saves, Jesus saves; Let the nations now rejoice. Jesus saves, Jesus saves; Shout salvation full and free, Highest hills and deepest caves, This our song of victory, Jesus saves! Jesus saves!*

- **Christian preaching acknowledges Jesus as Messiah** – *This Jesus of Nazareth was a man attested to you by God with miracles, wonders, and signs that God did among you through him, just as you yourselves know. Though he was delivered up according to God's determined plan and foreknowledge, you used lawless people to nail him to a cross and kill him. God raised him up, ending the pains of death, because it was not possible for him to be held by death.... he has been exalted to the right hand of God and has received from the Father the promised Holy Spirit, he has poured out what you both see and hear. (22-24; 33)*

Israel searched for salvation for centuries. Luke the physician, the author of Acts, records in his Gospel the case study of Simeon, the righteous and devout prophet who had been looking and longing all his life for the salvation of the Lord – the consolation of Israel. Simeon embraced God's promise that he would not die without seeing the Messiah. When Jesus' parents brought the Christ child to Simeon for the parent-child dedication, holding baby Jesus in his arms, Simeon shouts loudly, "*My eyes have seen your salvation!*" (Luke 2:25-30). Simeon's shout-out is now proclaimed at Pentecost. Peter ends his sermon with the

declaration – *Therefore let all the house of Israel know with certainty that God has made this Jesus, whom you crucified, both Lord and Messiah.*”(36)

2. **We should expect Conviction-centered Preaching.** Remember who’s preaching this sermon. Simon Peter, the bold Apostle, who followed Jesus with abandon, who defended Jesus when the soldiers came to arrest Him, but who denied even knowing Jesus when confronted outside the courtroom. Peter, the shameful Apostle, disgusted with himself, could not bring Himself to stand at the foot of the Cross as Jesus died. Peter, the convicted Apostle, who ran to tomb to hear for himself the testimony of the angel, *“He’s not here, for He has Risen, just as He said He would.”* And Peter, the restored Apostle, the one whom Jesus challenged, *“Upon your testimony that I am the Christ, the son of the living God, I will build my church, and the gates of Hades will not overcome it.”* Now, filled with and empowered by the Holy Spirit, Peter declared Jesus as Lord and Messiah with such power and unction that when they heard this, they were pierced to the heart (*katenugesan kardian* = violent conviction of the heart) and said to Peter and the rest of the apostles: *“Brothers, what should we do?”* Peter’s immediate response: *“Repent and be baptized, each of you, in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins, and you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. For the promise is for you and for your children, and for all who are far off, as many as the Lord our God will call.* (38).

- **Conviction creates a dilemma.** Christ-centered preaching confronts listeners with a personal dilemma and creates a quandary. *“What should we do?”* Every time God’s truth is proclaimed, the Holy Spirit convicts – pierces the heart – and creates this dilemma. Those who are not believers, those who have never professed faith in Jesus Christ and confessed Him as Lord and Savior, those who have no assurance of salvation, your heart is pierced with conviction, and that conviction will never go away until you choose – Choose either to accept Christ or reject Christ.

- **Conviction calls for a decision.** *“Repent – each of you.”* *Metanoia* – meaning a volitional change of mind that leads to a visible change of direction. Here’s the follow-through. Repentance is a change of mind that leads to baptism, forgiveness of sins, and the gift of the Holy Spirit. Peter, the preacher, called for decision – With many other words he testified....Peter’s finished with the semona, but now he extends the invitation with many words (I doubt they sang two or three verses of a hymn) and strongly urged them, saying, *“Be saved from this corrupt generation!”* 3000 accepted the preacher’s invitation that day, were baptized, and were added to the 120. Historians estimate Jerusalem’s resident population at time as approximately 55,000, swelling to 180,000 during pilgrim festivals. (J. Jeremias, *Jerusalem at the Time of Jesus*, Philadelphia: Fortress, 1989, p. 83). The

Temple court could accommodate up to 200,000. We're not sure how many heard Peter's sermon, but it's not hard to envision a "Billy Graham crusade" type of occasion, with tens of thousands gathered on the Temple promenade, and 3,000 responding to the invitation. This is just a side note, but the church grew from a small church to a megachurch in one day!

Preaching is a worship matter, but your response to the invitation is an eternal matter. Some of you are experiencing violent conviction right here, right now. Here's your dilemma – decide now, or decide later. What would keep you from deciding now? Why would you risk another chance? Why would you postpone the most important decision you will ever make – the one which will seal your eternal destiny? Remember this – If you decide not to decide, you've decided.